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GEOGRAPHICAL INFLUENCES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF WISCONSIN *

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CHAPTER III. THE SETTLEMENT OF WISCONSIN

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An effort has been made to give the salient points of the geography and geology of Wisconsin and to show how these conditions affected the Indian fur trade and the early exploration of the state. The discussion now aims to show how physical conditions influenced the distribution and activities of the settlers.

Previous to 1822 Green Bay and Prairie du Chien were the only places in Wisconsin with a sufficiently large white population to appear on the population maps of the Federal Census (Figs. 6 and 7). The settlement of Wisconsin by Americans began in 1822 in the southwestern part of the state. Col. James Johnson and a small party of men under the protection of troops sent out by the War Department took possession of the lead district. "A very few persons, probably not more than twenty, spent the ensuing

* Continued from pp. 401-412 and 490-499.

winter at Galena.”¹ In August, 1823, the population of the lead region was 74 persons—men, women, and children—of whom a number were negroes. The fame of the upper Mississippi lead mines spread throughout the country. The desire for easily acquired wealth, the love of adventure, and the spirit of migration took possession of the people, and there was a rush of immigration to this region. The miners came from Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri, and Illinois. The first comers did not have in

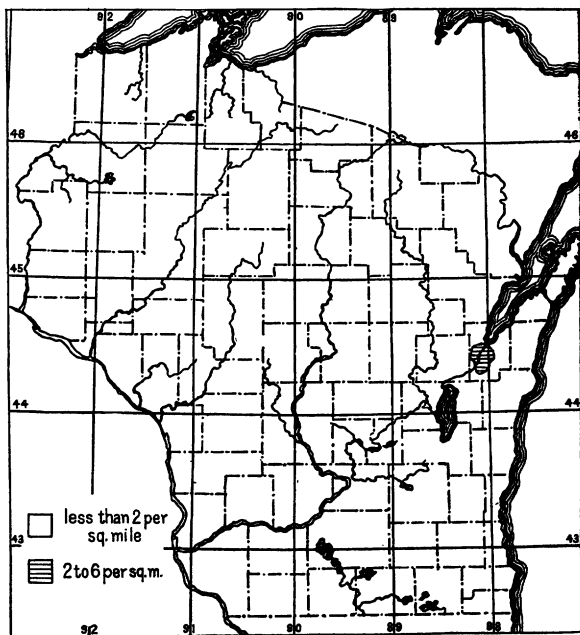


FIG. 6—Distribution of Population in 1790. Scale, 1:6,000,000.

view the acquisition of land and the making of homes. Most of them were not even professional miners. Many came in the spring by way of the Mississippi River or overland by wagon or stage, and went away again in the autumn. This migratory habit caused them to be named “Suckers,” after a fish which inhabits the waters of this region. Some of these adventurers worked together in pairs as partners. They would provide a habitation for themselves by digging a hole in the side of a hill large enough for two to sleep and cook their meals in, thus earning the name of “Badgers.”²

¹ Strong, M. M.: *History of Wisconsin Territory*, p. 117.

² *Wis. State Hist. Proc.*, 1907, p. 304. From a letter by M. M. Strong to the *Madison State Journal*, Dec. 10, 1879.

In 1827, Cornishmen began to arrive in the lead region.³ The decline of mining at home made them look elsewhere for a livelihood, and the glowing accounts of the upper Mississippi lead mines attracted them to this district. The estimated population of the mining region in 1825 was 200; in 1826, 1,000; in 1827, 4,000; and in 1828, 10,000.⁴ Some of the settlements which were started at that time were Hazel Green, New Diggins, Cassville, Gratiot,

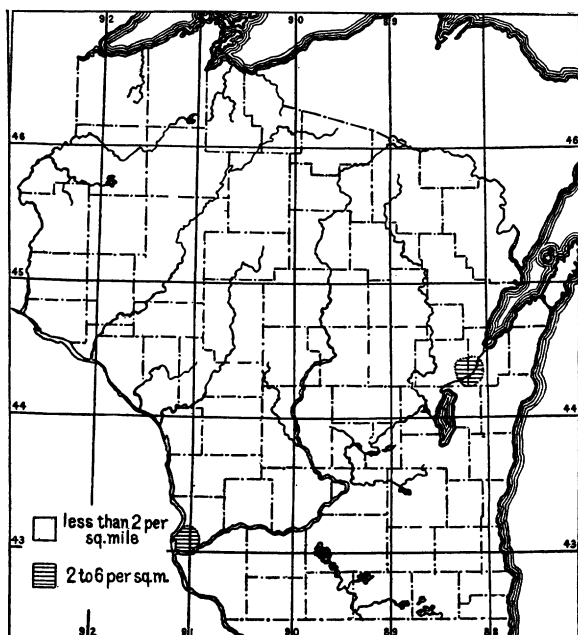


FIG. 7.—Distribution of Population in 1800. Scale, 1:6,000,000.

Platteville, Mineral Point, Dodgeville, Blue Mounds, and Lancaster (Fig. 8).

The encroachments of the whites on what the Indians regarded as their property created great bitterness of feeling among the savages, which resulted in the Indian disturbance of 1827, known as the Winnebago War. Peace was restored very shortly, but was broken again in 1832 by Black Hawk's War. Black Hawk was captured August 27, 1832. Thereupon the Indians agreed to move to the west side of the Mississippi River, and what is now the state of Wisconsin has not since been the scene of Indian troubles.

³ Thwaites, R. G.: *Wisconsin*, p. 201.

⁴ Strong, M. M.: *History of Wisconsin Territory*, p. 117.

Following the disbanding of the army engaged in the Indian wars there came a great increase in settlement, largely agricultural, in southern Wisconsin. The causes of the increased migration were various. (1) The lead miners were anxious to obtain provisions at reasonable prices, and they encouraged the immigration of farmers by advertising the agricultural possibilities of the region. (2) The soldiers who served in the Winnebago and Black Hawk Wars were so pleased by the beauty, fertility, and climate

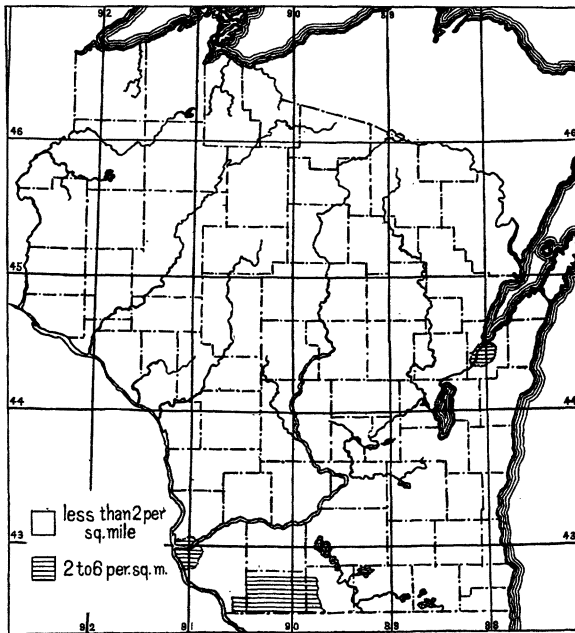


FIG. 8—Distribution of Population in 1830. Scale, 1:6,000,000.

of the country that many of them settled there, and their accounts of the region brought many others. (3) The settling of the Indian troubles and the removal of the savages across the Mississippi brought the region into good repute with the peaceably inclined. (4) The low price of land, \$1.25 an acre, made it profitable for farmers to sell their land in older settled districts and move where they could get more and better land for their money. (5) The time and cost of travel to the West had been reduced greatly by the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825, and by the use of steamboats on Lake Michigan. The first steamer appeared on the lake in 1826, and the number increased rapidly after 1835. (6) The panic

of 1837 checked for a time the immigration from the East, but later increased it, because many of the factories in the East were compelled to close, and their hands came west. (7) The importation of merino sheep and the protective tariffs of 1824 and 1828 encouraged the wool industry in the East. The hill lands were bought by moneyed men for sheep raising at a price that the poor farmer could not afford to refuse. (8) Irish immigrants displaced

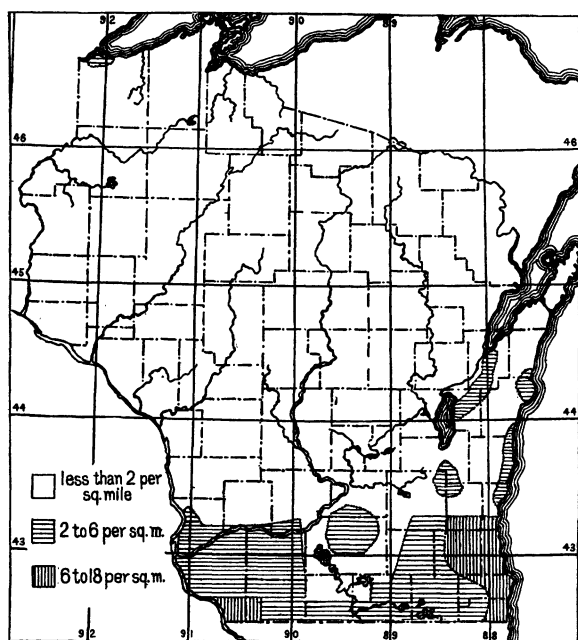


FIG. 9—Distribution of Population in 1840. Scale, 1:6,000,000.

the New Englanders as mill workers in many of the eastern factories, and the displaced factory hands migrated.

The great bulk of the immigration to Wisconsin came in at the lake ports and naturally settled in the eastern and southeastern parts of the state (Figs. 9 and 10). In May, 1838, the census gave Wisconsin a population of 18,149.⁵ The Federal Census of 1840 showed a population of 30,945.

“ With the exception of some private land claims at and near Green Bay and Prairie du Chien, which had been confirmed by the general government, none of the public lands within the limits of

⁵ Strong, M. M.: *History of Wisconsin Territory*, p. 268.

Wisconsin had previous to 1834 been disposed of."⁵ June 26, 1834, by an act of Congress, the area south of the Fox-Wisconsin Rivers and north of the Illinois boundary was divided into two land districts. The Green Bay district extended from Lake Michigan to a north-south line just west of Fort Winnebago, and the Wisconsin district from this line to the Mississippi. Some of the public land had been surveyed previous to 1834, and after that date the survey was carried on rapidly, so that presently the ownership of the land passed from the government to private individuals and settlement extended in all directions. The first public sale of land was held at the Mineral Point land office November 10, 1834. The first sales at the Green Bay office occurred August 17 and 31, 1835.

LAND SOLD IN WISCONSIN TO 1843⁶.

YEAR	ACRES	VALUE
1835.....	217,543.91	\$316,709.07
1836.....	646,133.73	808,932.32
1837.....	178,783.45	223,479.45
1838.....	87,256.31	109,416.14
1839.....	650,722.82	819,909.90
1840.....	127,798.34	159,848.48
1841.....	101,731.17	127,446.31
1842 ⁷	88,929.11	113,755.39
1842 ⁸	200,000.00 ⁹	250,000.00 ⁹
	2,298,898.84	\$2,929,497.06

The location of the homes of the immigrants was determined by several considerations. The deciding influence in many cases was nearness to (1) a navigable stream or a highway, (2) market, (3) the site of a projected town, (4) neighbors, or (5) water and wood supply. (6) With a few the opportunity to combine mining with farming was the controlling factor.

(1) The influence of navigable streams upon the distribution of population is shown in the early settlement of Beloit, Janesville, Fort Atkinson, Watertown, and Hustisford on the Rock; Packwaukee, Berlin, and Omro on the Fox; and Oshkosh, Winneconne, and Shawano on the Wolf. In many such cases, waterpower was available for running grist mills and saw mills. The influence of rivers on settlement is shown, too, in the distribution of population along the Mississippi, Chippewa, and Wisconsin Rivers in 1850 (Fig. 10).

⁵ Strong, M. M.: *History of Wisconsin Territory*, p. 268.

⁶ Lapham, I.: *Wisconsin*, p. 32.

⁷ Jan. 1 to Sept. 30.

⁸ Oct. 1 to Dec. 31.

⁹ Estimated.

The roads of the state were of great importance in distributing the agricultural population. In 1824 what was probably the first road in the state was laid out along the east side of Fox River from Green Bay to Kaukauna and was paid for by private subscription.¹⁰ In 1833 a government road was begun between Green Bay and Prairie du Chien (Fig. 11). It passed through the present towns of Depere, Calumet, Fond du Lac, Portage, along the crest of Military Ridge to the Mississippi, and then to Prairie

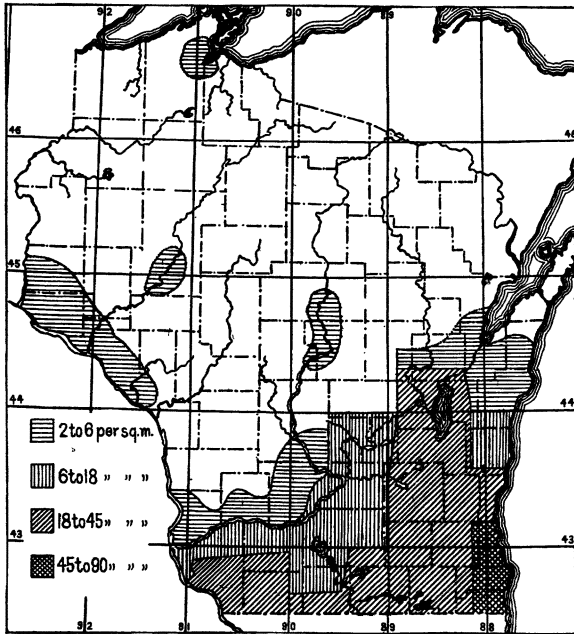


FIG. 10—Distribution of Population in 1850. Scale, 1:6,000,000.

du Chien.¹¹ This road was not open for travel until 1835. In 1834 the territory of Michigan established a road from Milwaukee to the Mississippi by way of the Platte Mounds, and in 1835 extensions were built from Milwaukee to Lake Winnebago, and from the Blue Mounds to the state line in the direction of Chicago. The road which extended from the lead region through Blue Mounds to Madison was known as the Blue Mounds Road and became one of the chief thoroughfares of the territory. It was over this road

¹⁰ Thwaites, R. G.: *Wisconsin*, p. 250.

¹¹ Matteson, C. S.: *History of Wisconsin*, p. 171.

that the caravans from the lead country drew their loads to Milwaukee to be shipped east, and over it they returned with supplies and immigrants for the interior of the state. By 1840 Prairie du Chien, the towns of the lead region, Green Bay, and the Lake Michigan towns were connected by roads with the interior towns of Beloit, Janesville, and Madison, and with each other. The first road to be built north and west of the Fox-Wisconsin Rivers was

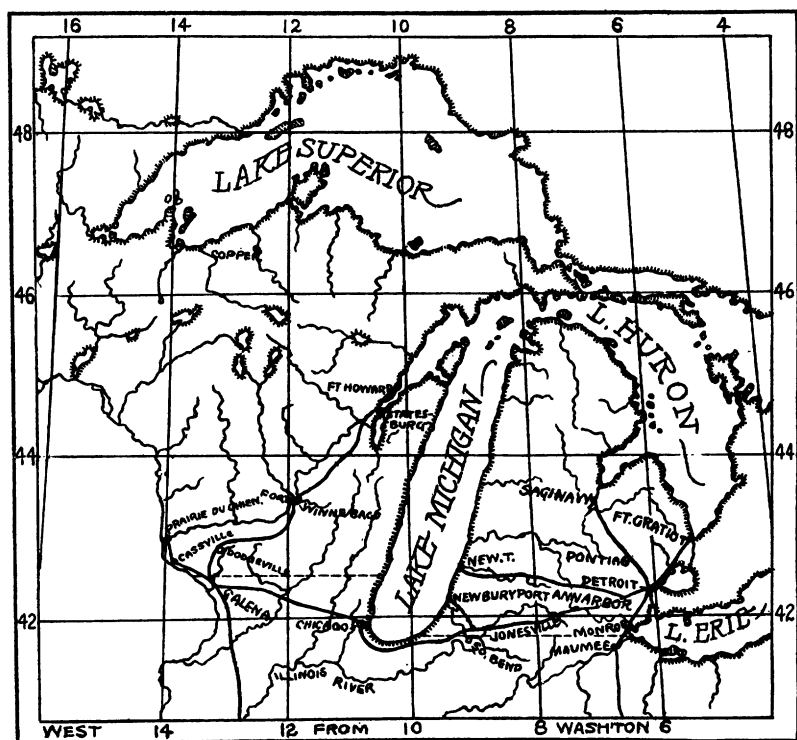


FIG. 11—Michigan Territory in 1832. Scale, 1:10,000,000. From Robt. Baird: *View of the Mississippi*.

begun in 1843, and was to extend from Prairie du Chien to Chequamegon Bay by way of the Black and Chippewa Rivers.¹² As settlement progressed more roads were laid out, and in 1851, when the first piece of railroad in the state was finished between Milwaukee and Waukesha, there was a network of wagon roads over the southern part of Wisconsin (Fig. 12). The early roads of the state

¹² Thwaites, R. G.: *Wisconsin*, p. 251.

capital would be located in his neighborhood.”¹³ Land was chosen with little regard for quality, which was in general a wise move. However, the average value of farm land near Madison is not now as high as in some of the townships farther removed from market.

(4) The character and nearness of neighbors were matters which were frequently of the utmost importance in locating newcomers. Often several families, who had known each other in the East, settled close together and formed a community similar to the one from which they came. Such a community was Beloit. The founders of Beloit came from Colebrook, in the northern part of New Hampshire. Becoming dissatisfied with the conditions under which they were living, they determined to look for larger opportunities. The “New England Emigrating Company” was organized in October, 1836, and sent agents west to find a suitable location. They secured a tract of land at the state boundary where the Turtle River empties into the Rock. The things which appealed to them at this place were the high bluff where the rivers join, the waterpower, the gravel which they could use for roads, and the abundant game. The emigrants from Colebrook, together with six families from southern New Hampshire, came west and settled on the site selected. The name of the town was a combination of Belle and Detroit. They platted their village with broad streets like a New England town, and named one street “College Street” before they knew they were to have a college. One of their number was a deacon, and they held religious services at their houses before they had time to build a church.¹⁴ They were a selected group of men and women who were able to make good use of the many opportunities which this new country offered.

(5) The available supply of wood, water, and wild hay determined the location of many new homes. Immigrants from New England, New York, and England chose places where they could have both prairie and woods, with water if possible. The difficulty of digging wells on some of the prairies, the lack of wood, the need of protection from the wind, and the toughness of the prairie sod discouraged settlement there for a time. The high price of wheat in the early fifties made this land so desirable that it was finally all taken up.¹⁵ The oak openings, on the other hand, had neither the objections of the prairie nor those of the heavily wooded areas.

¹³ Hibbard, B. H.: *History of Agriculture in Dane County*, *Bull. Univ. Wisconsin*, No. 101, p. 106.

¹⁴ Whitney, H. M.: *The Settlement of Beloit*, *Wis. Hist. Soc. Proc.*, 1898, p. 134.

¹⁵ Hibbard, B. H.: *History of Agriculture in Dane County*, *Bull. Univ. Wisconsin*, No. 101, p. 109.

There was plenty of wood, the stumps were removed easily, there was usually water to be had without great inconvenience and the ground was loose and easy to break. Many Germans and Norwegians settled on the hilly land, perhaps because they were accustomed to it at home.¹⁶ Most foreigners were afraid of wind storms and avoided the open. The settlers from the Mississippi Valley states were not afraid of the prairies because they had had some experience with them, and realized the relative ease of obtaining returns from a soil unencumbered with timber and brush.

(6) The opportunity of combining mining with farming located many of the Cornishmen, who came about this time, in the lead region.

Previous to this wave of agricultural immigration the history of Wisconsin had been largely dependent upon and controlled by its rivers as highways. Nearly all the people who traveled through this territory did so by its waterways. The few settlers at Green Bay and Prairie du Chien were located along the rivers. Now, however, the American pioneer was seeking good farm land and, although ease of communication was of great importance, many of the settlers were obliged to settle inland away from the river courses. In many cases the backwoodsman, having laid out his claim and built his log house, found that he was perhaps a hundred miles from a grist mill and twenty-five or thirty miles from the nearest post office, the only connection between him and his market being a mere trail.¹⁷

With the exception of a border of timber along Lake Michigan, the whole southern part of Wisconsin, besides a considerable strip along the Mississippi and St. Croix Rivers, was characterized by prairies and oak openings (Fig. 13). The prairies were small compared with many of those in Illinois. They were surrounded by woods, which furnished fuel and partial protection from the winds, and they were usually well watered by lakes and streams. Locally, however, all the water used was carried a distance of five miles or more until a well could be sunk.¹⁸ The oak openings were very important features in southern Wisconsin. They were of two kinds—the black oak openings which belonged to the sandy regions and were relatively infertile, and the burr oak openings which were among the most productive portions of the wheat raising

¹⁶ Hibbard, B. H.: *History of Agriculture in Dane County*, *Bull. Univ. Wisconsin*, 101, p. 108.

¹⁷ Thwaites, R. G.: *Wisconsin*, p. 249.

¹⁸ Hibbard, B. H.: *History of Agriculture in Dane County*, *Bull. Univ. Wisconsin*, No. 101, p. 109.

area.¹⁹ The openings were groves of oaks scattered here and there over what would have been, except for them, a prairie country. Except fencing and fuel the openings furnished little of value in the way of timber.

The breaking of the prairie sod was difficult. Usually it was accomplished by means of a large plow which would cut a furrow

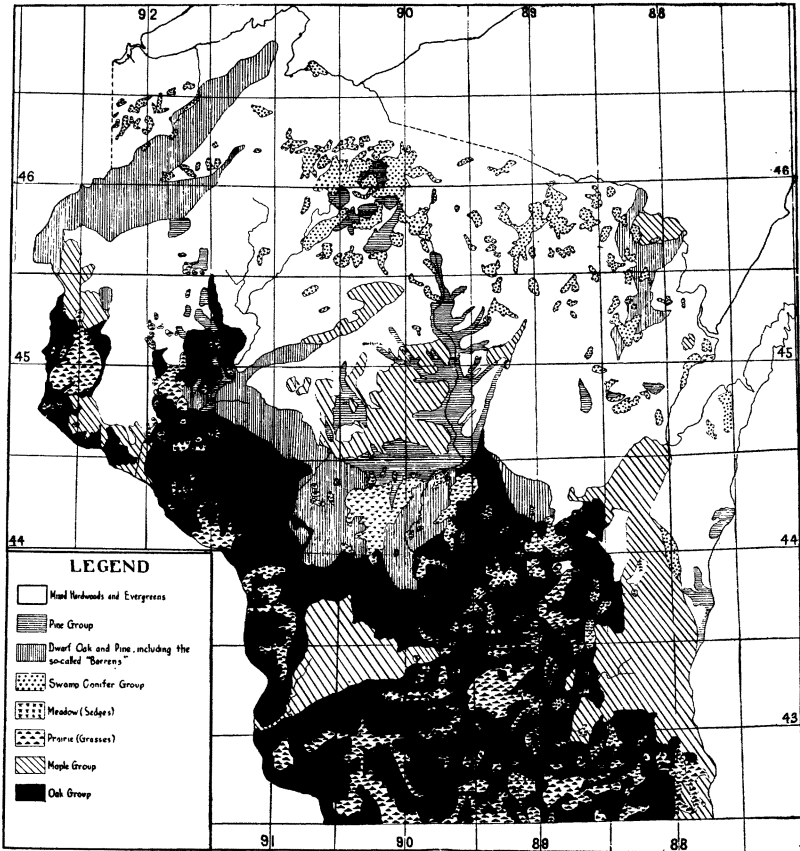


FIG. 13—General Map of the Native Vegetation of Wisconsin, from the Atlas of the Geological Survey of Wisconsin, Plate No. 11A. Scale, 1:4,500,000.

two feet wide and three to four inches deep. This was drawn by six yoke of oxen, such a team being able to turn three to four acres of prairie sod a day. The soil of the oak openings was plowed much more easily, and this made the openings greatly sought after as

¹⁹ *Trans. Wis. State Agri. Soc.*, Vol. VI, 1860, p. 47.

places to settle. Sixty acres of prairie sod was the average amount for a man with a good plow and a team to reduce in a season. The preparation of timbered land was a much slower process. The trees were cut into suitable lengths, piled in convenient places and burned. If there happened to be a demand for potash in the nearest market, the ashes of the hardwoods could be made to produce some small income, but usually the timber was not only without value, but was a source of expense.

Besides the permanent settlers who came to Wisconsin many speculators bought large tracts of choice land, usually along the main thoroughfares, with the expectation of making a large profit by selling it to settlers willing to pay for a site along a highway. The result was that many settled away on the cross roads and intermediate tracts, and "there you will see many of the best farms and the finest improvements."²⁰ Buying of land for speculation occurred extensively before 1837, as shown by the fact that about 500,000 more acres were sold during 1835 and 1836 than in 1837 and 1838, although the population in 1838 was nearly double that of 1836. The decrease in speculation was probably due to the financial panic. Settlers who came in the years 1836, 1837, and 1838 avoided the counties where the land had been sold to non-residents and swarmed to the counties of Racine, Kenosha, Waukesha, Dodge, Jefferson, Walworth, and the eastern part of Rock and Columbia, where they had a choice of land. When this land was offered for sale in 1839 these "squatters" redeemed their "claims."

Some of the towns to be settled by this wave of immigration were Milwaukee, Racine, Kenosha, and Janesville in 1835, Beloit and Watertown in 1836, Madison in 1837, and Fond du Lac and Whitewater in 1839. In 1837 Congress established 15 new post routes in the territory, making a total of 35, and in June, 1838, there were 80 post offices in Wisconsin east of the Mississippi.²¹

About 1840 a strong foreign element appeared in the incoming tide of settlers. The Germans came first. It is not known when the first German came to Wisconsin, but the first one settled in Milwaukee County in 1835. During the summer of 1840 Milwaukee received 200 to 300 German immigrants a week. In the summers of 1843 and 1844 from 1,000 to 1,500 arrived each week. In the latter years they did not remain in Milwaukee in such large numbers as at first, but penetrated into the interior of the state.²²

²⁰ Curtiss, D. S.: *Western Portraiture*, p. 137.

²¹ Strong, M. M.: *History of Wisconsin Territory*, p. 264.

²² Faust, A. B.: *The German Element in the United States*, Vol. I, p. 420.

The German immigration was greatest between 1846 and 1854 and between 1881 and 1884.

TABLE OF GERMAN-BORN POPULATION IN WISCONSIN.

Census	German-born	Percentage of Entire Population of State	Percentage of Foreign Population	Increase
1850.....	38,068	11.3	32.4
1860.....	123,879	15.97	44.7	85,191
1870.....	162,314	15.39	45.0	38,425
1880.....	184,328	14.0	45.0	22,014
1885.....	265,756	16.99	53.8	71,428
				Decrease
1890.....	259,819	15.34	50.0	5,837
1900.....	242,777	11.68	47.05	17,042
1905.....	226,154	10.1	44.8	16,623

The causes of the German immigration to Wisconsin were economic, political, social, and geographical. The effort to convert Wisconsin into a German state centered the attention of the Germans upon it, and as it was thrown open for settlement at a time when a haven for political refugees was much in demand, it received a great number of well-educated, intelligent young men, who could no longer live in Germany. The climate suited the Germans. It is similar to that of their own country, and the products of the soil were such as they had raised at home for generations—wheat, rye, oats, barley, and garden vegetables. There was no lack of employment. A young man might, by working as a farm hand, or by doing other common labor, earn enough in a few seasons to buy a farm. The hard times in Germany, together with a disinclination to render military service, were in many cases an inducement to migrate. Those who had settled in Wisconsin were successful, and their letters and often their money, which had been sent home, brought friends who usually settled near them. Pamphlets and books were written on Wisconsin by Germans who had traveled through or were living in the state. Many of these articles came out before 1850, and to each one the state is indebted for a certain number of German settlers. When Wisconsin was admitted as a state there was no debt, as in Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan, and this fact, with the correspondingly low taxes, appealed strongly to the cautious foreigner. By the efforts of the German delegates sent from Milwaukee to the constitutional convention of Wisconsin, the constitution adopted by the state was liberal to foreigners, requiring but one year's residence for the privilege of voting. The state

sold its school lands early and at a low price, usually at \$1.25 an acre, sometimes less in the poorer sections. Even the poorest immigrant could afford to buy, especially when much of the land was sold on credit. In 1852 Wisconsin had a state law providing for the appointment of a commissioner of immigration who should

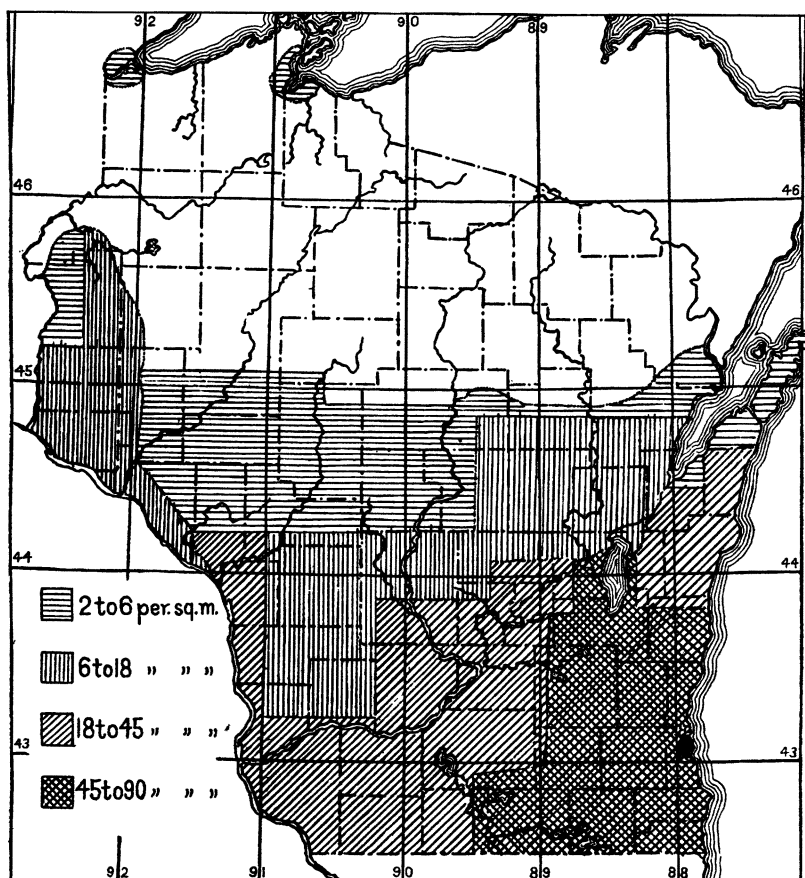


FIG. 14—Distribution of Population in 1860. Scale, 1:4,500,000.

reside in New York City during the year and whose business it was to furnish immigrants with information about Wisconsin.²³ The commissioner published pamphlets regarding the conditions in Wisconsin and had them distributed in Europe. He also advertised for settlers in selected German newspapers both in America and

²³ Faust, A. B.: *The German Element in the United States*, Vol. I, p. 476.

abroad. During eight months of the year 1853 the commissioner "received and answered 317 letters from Europe."²⁴ "Over 3,000 people visited his office, of whom two-thirds were Germans. Often money was sent to him from people in Wisconsin to assist friends and relatives on their arrival in New York."²⁴

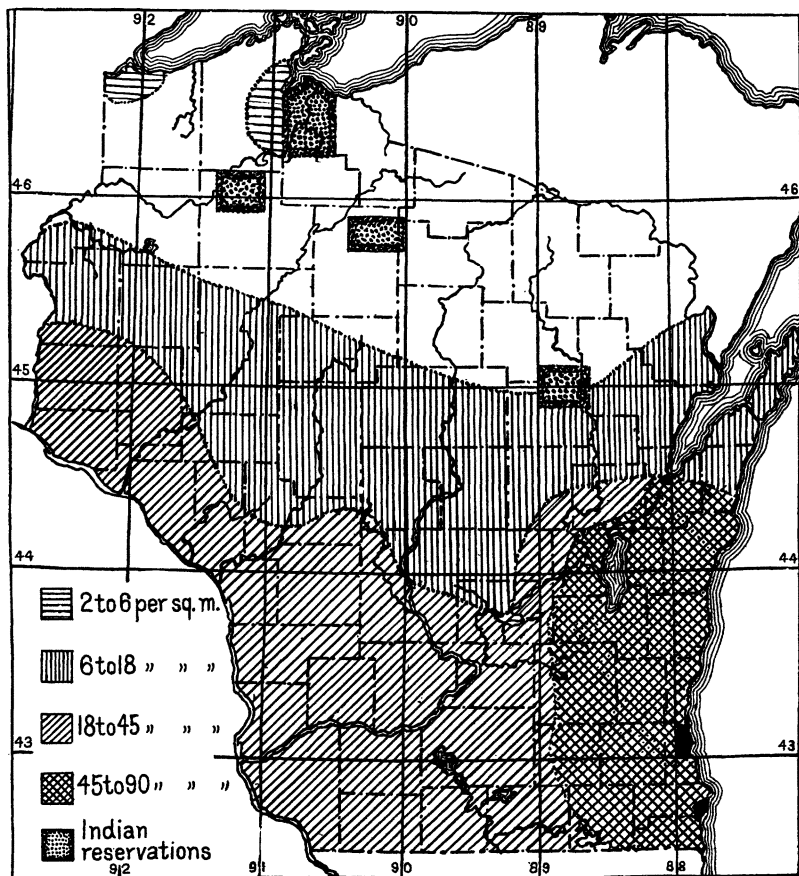


FIG. 15—Distribution of Population in 1870. Scale, 1:4,500,000.

The Germans settled in greatest numbers in the eastern and north central parts of the state, including Marathon and Shawano Counties, keeping to the heavily wooded area, as already noted. There is a large German population in Sauk and Buffalo Counties. Many Germans live, too, along the line of the Wisconsin Central Railroad to Lake Superior.

²⁴ Everest, K. A.: *Wisconsin's German Element*, *Wis. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. XII, p. 320.

Usually the immigrants came first to Milwaukee, which was the largest and best known Wisconsin port on Lake Michigan, and from there they went inland. As the counties near Milwaukee became filled they followed the timbered land north, penetrating Shawano County by means of the Wolf River, along which they

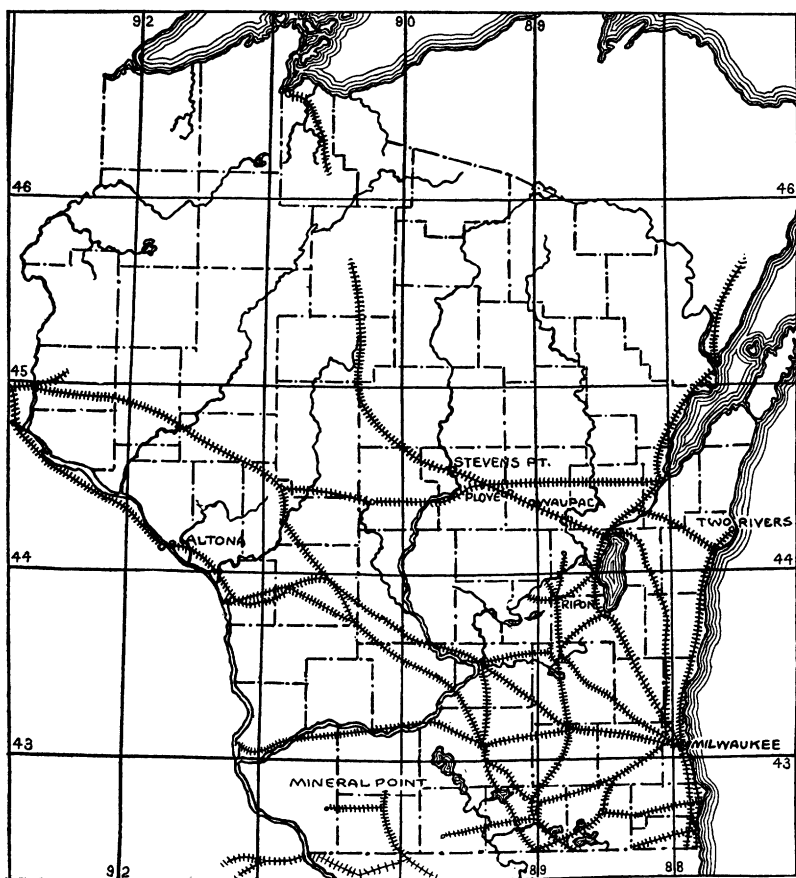


FIG. 16—Distribution of Railroads in 1873. Scale, 1:4,500,000.

made many settlements. The settling of Shawano County was helped also by the government roads which crossed it. There was the military road projected and partly finished from Green Bay to Ashland and another road connecting Shawano and Oshkosh.

Marathon and Lincoln Counties were settled first along the Wisconsin River. The settlements began long after the Wisconsin

sin Central Railroad was built through this region (Figs. 14 and 15).²⁵ With the completion of the Wisconsin Central Railroad to Lake Superior (Figs. 16 and 17) settlement advanced northward. The Wisconsin Central Company received a grant of land from the government which included every alternate section within twenty

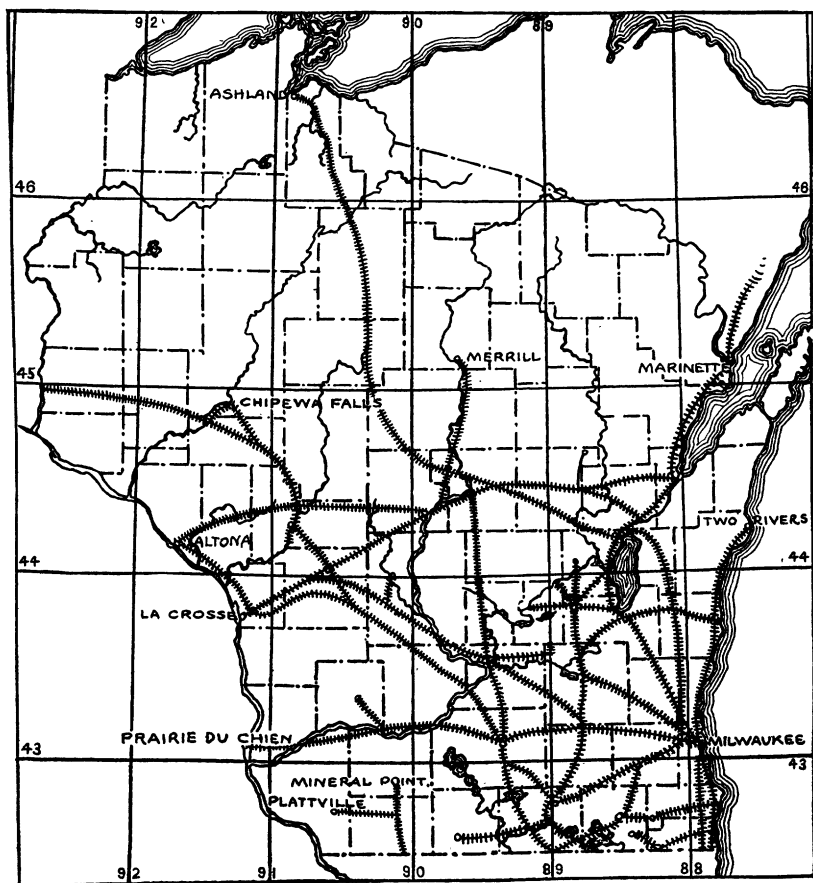


FIG. 17.—Distribution of Railroads in 1880. Scale, 1:4,500,000.

miles of the right of way. The company sent an agent, who was also an agent for the state, to Europe to secure immigrants to settle along the line of the road. Some 5,000 people came, mostly from the forests of Bavaria. Cheap land, good wages in winter in

²⁵ The Wisconsin Central Railroad was built to Steven's Point in 1871, and finished to Ashland in 1877.

the lumber camps, and the fact that the sale of timber would often pay for the land on which it stood, were the inducements offered.

Sauk Prairie was settled by the Germans in 1840, Buffalo County in 1841. The Buffalo County settlement was started by some men who had been sent from Galena to cut wood for the passing steamboats on the Mississippi.

In due time the Germans were followed by other Europeans. There were Scandinavians (chiefly Norwegians), Bohemians, Poles, Dutch, Belgians, Swiss, people from the British Isles, and Canadians. Wisconsin is noted for the variety and solidarity of its groups of foreign-born people. These groups are made up not only of people of the same nationality, but from the same district or town, and people who were neighbors in Europe may be neighbors in Wisconsin. This shows that the immigration movement was not a matter of individual restlessness and desire for adventure, but was due to economic or political conditions which impelled whole groups of people to move in a body from their homes and form new communities. This type of movement is exemplified by the Swiss colony of New Glarus as well as by any other foreign group in Wisconsin. Stagnation in business and the partial crop failure of 1845 caused great distress among the poor classes in the canton of Glarus, Switzerland. A movement looking to migration was started, money was appropriated by the government, this fund was increased by private subscription, and two men were sent to America in search of a new home. They purchased in the northern part of Green County a 1,200 acre tract of land in one body and a detached 80 acres of timber. Of the 193 persons who started from Switzerland, 108 settled upon the land selected for them and formed the colony of New Glarus, which became the nucleus of a large and exceptionally prosperous Swiss settlement.²⁶ There are several other Swiss settlements in the western part of Green County. Among themselves these people speak the German-Swiss dialect of their mother country. They have incorporated into the life of their communities the customs and industries of their old home. It was in this Swiss colony that the manufacture of American Swiss cheese was first started in Wisconsin.²⁷ There are also several groups of Swiss outside of Green County, notably in Buffalo, Pierce, Winnebago, and Fond du Lac Counties.²⁸

"Previous to the year 1840 there were but six Norwegian set-

²⁶ Luchsinger, John: *The Swiss Colony of New Glarus, Wis. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. XIII, p. 416.

²⁷ See Chapter VII, in December *Bulletin*, under "Manufacture of Swiss Cheese."

²⁸ Legler, H. E.: *Leading Events in Wisconsin History*, p. 208.

tlements in North America, and of these, three were located in Wisconsin. The first Norwegian settlement in Wisconsin was the fourth in America."²⁹ It was at Jefferson Prairie, Rock County. The next Norwegian settlement (1839) was the Muskego settlement in southern Waukesha and northern Racine Counties. These people were induced to migrate by encouraging reports from the Jefferson colony. In 1840 the sixth Norwegian settlement in America and the third in Wisconsin was planted at Koshkonong. It is said to be the largest and wealthiest community of Norwegian farmers on the continent.³⁰ There are large Norwegian settlements in Portage, Pierce, Waupaca, Winnebago, Dane, and Vernon Counties. Icelanders occupy Washington Island in Green Bay.

There are several important Polish communities in the state. The fourteenth ward in Milwaukee is almost solidly Polish, and there are large numbers in other wards of the city. There are Polish groups in Beaver Dam, Berlin, Steven's Point, and also in other parts of the state.²⁸

The northern part of Wisconsin was settled much more slowly than the southern. This was due primarily to the impenetrability of the forests, the great difficulty of clearing the cut-over land of its pine stumps, the greater rigor of the climate, and general ignorance regarding the conditions of surface and soil. In 1848 almost the only settlements north and west of the Wisconsin River, except La Crosse, were a few lumber camps along the streams. How little was known of this region is indicated by the fact that "in 1847 Mr. Thos. Owen, an eminent geologist, characterized it as a 'desert of sands, unapproachable by the agriculturalist.'"³¹ Some years later the "Wisconsin Farmer" stated that central and northern Wisconsin "was an alternation of arid sand ridges and impassable marshes."³¹

La Crosse was settled in 1824 and was supported by an agricultural population attracted by the fertile prairie surrounding it, and by the lumber business, to which it fell heir by virtue of its position at the mouths of the La Crosse and Black Rivers. Besides these natural advantages, it was selected as the Wisconsin terminus for the Milwaukee and Mississippi Railroad, which was finished to this point in 1859. Through La Crosse passed many of the emigrants going to Minnesota and the states farther west, as well as the east-bound produce sent from these states.

²⁸ Legler, H. E., *Leading Events in Wisconsin History*, p. 208.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

³¹ *Wisconsin in Three Centuries*, Vol. III, p. 29.

By 1860 settlement had reached the forested area, but had scarcely gone beyond its edge (Fig. 14). The census of 1860 gives the towns of Oconto, Steven's Point, Wausau, Black River Falls, Eau Claire, Chippewa Falls, Menominee, Durand, River Falls, Prescott, and Hudson, of which only Prescott and Hudson had a population of more than 1,000. West Superior, Ashland, Med-

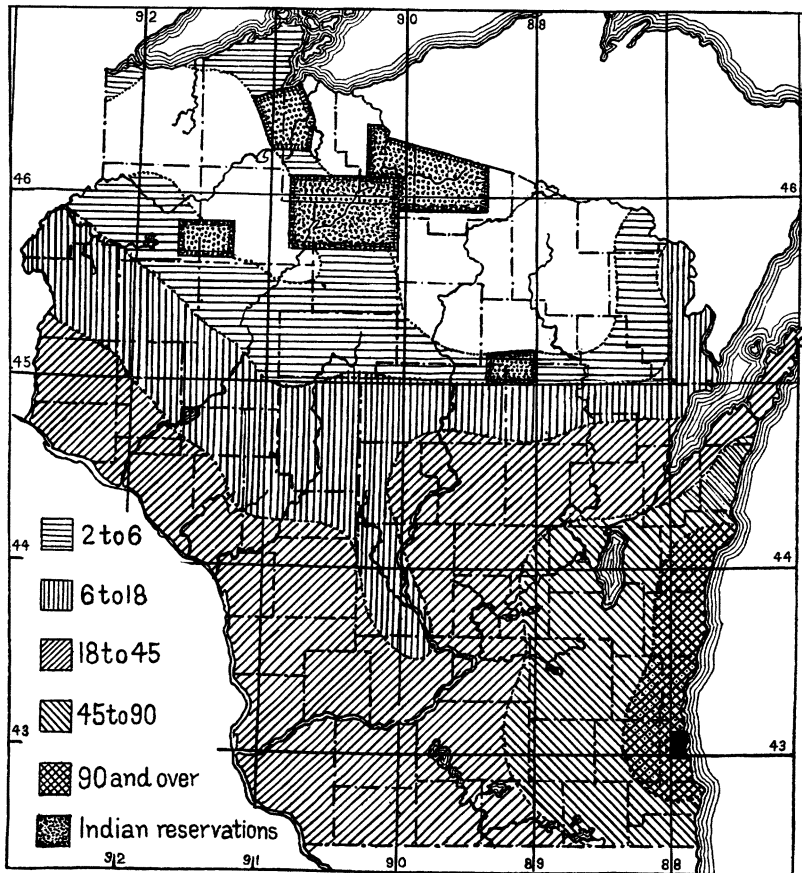


FIG. 18—Distribution of Population in 1880. Scale, 1:4,500,000.

ford, Phillips, Rhinelander, Antigo, Tomahawk, and Merrill were not then in existence.

So long as there were no railroads through the forest, settlements were made only near the rivers. How closely the distribution of population was controlled by the railroads is shown by the narrow zone of settlement along the line of the Wisconsin Central

Railroad in 1880 (Fig. 18). This railroad was not completed until 1877. West Superior had less than 1,000 inhabitants in 1882, when it was reached by the Northern Pacific Railway. In 1885 its population was 2,904. The railroad was continued to Ashland, and its route is marked by a band of settlement on the population map of

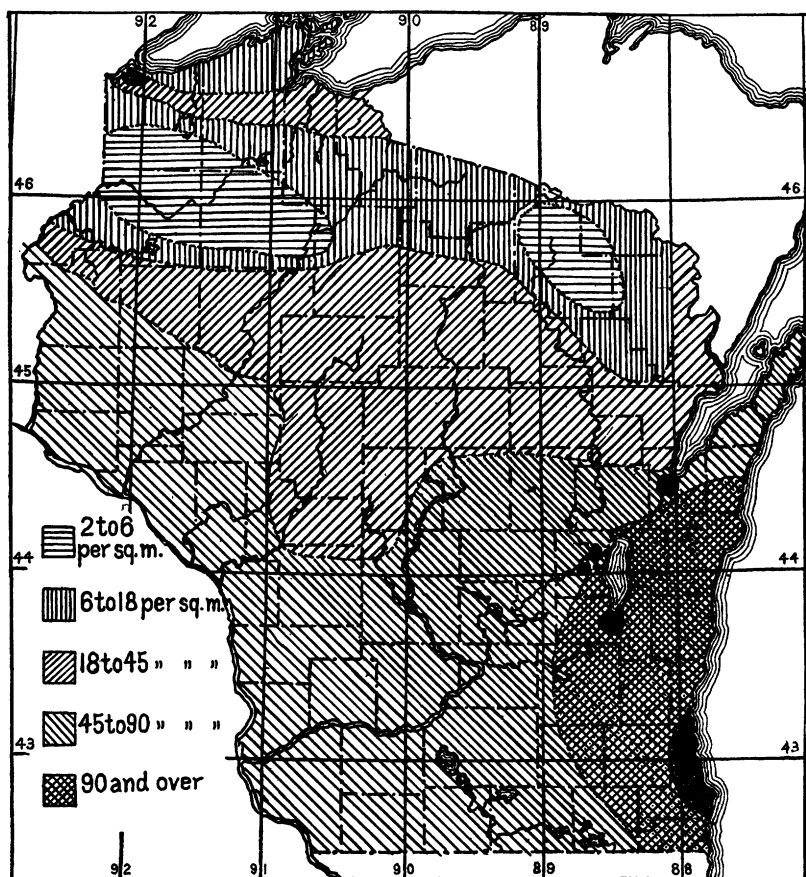


FIG. 19.—Distribution of Population in 1890. Scale, 1:4,500,000.

1890 (Fig. 19). The prosperity of the towns that were built by the lumber industry naturally fluctuated with that business. Nearly all of these towns show a rapid increase of population between 1875 and 1885, when lumbering was at its height in Wisconsin (Fig. 20). After 1885 Eau Claire, Chippewa Falls, and Grand Rapids lost population. Grand Rapids recovered after 1890 because of manufacturing interests located there, but the two for-

mer have never since reached their high mark of 1885. Most of these lumbering towns had a decrease in the rate of growth, if not an actual decrease in population. Superior seems to be an excep-

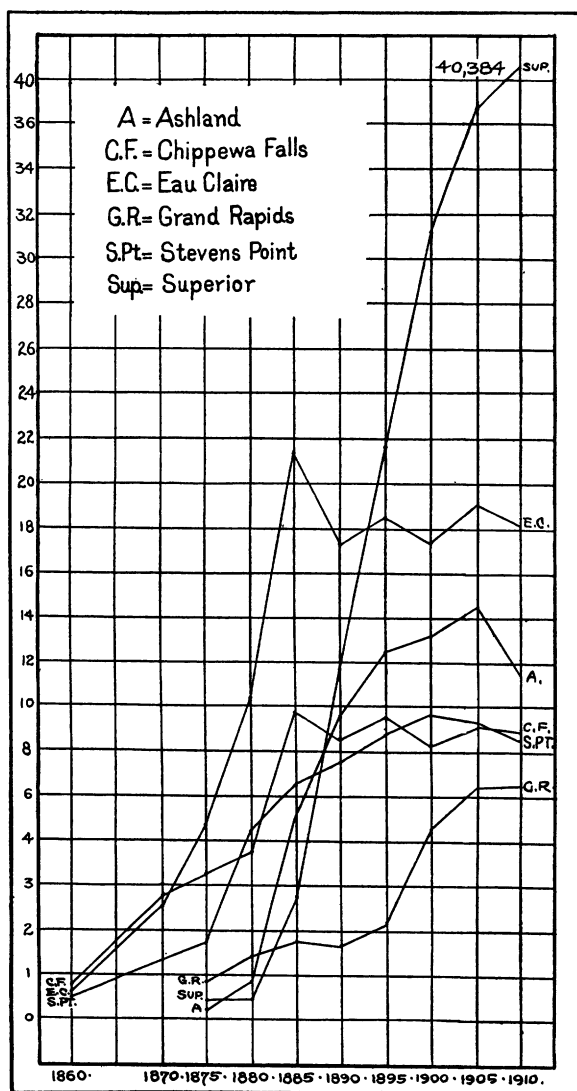


FIG. 20—Increase in Population (by thousands) of Towns in Lumber Region of Wisconsin.

tion to the rule, but it is only because Superior was not dependent upon lumber alone, but was supported by the grain from Minne-

sota and the Dakotas and the iron ore from Minnesota. By 1900 the state had everywhere a population of at least 2 to 6 to the square mile (Fig. 21).

The early immigrants came to Wisconsin chiefly by the waterways. Its location between the lakes and the Mississippi made the

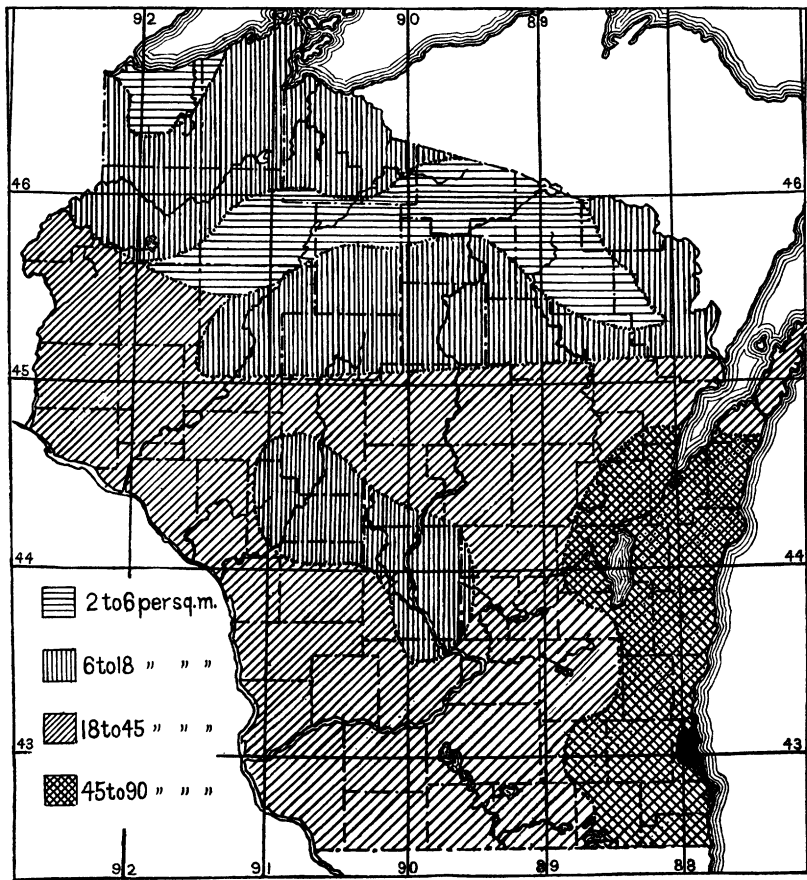


FIG. 21.—Distribution of Population in 1900. Scale: 1:4,700,000.

state accessible both from the east and south. The lead miners came from the south by way of the Mississippi River or overland by wagon and stage from southern Illinois. Cornishmen, who began to appear in the lead region in 1827, did not pursue any stated course after leaving England by way of Penzance or Falmouth. Some came to New Orleans and then up the Mississippi River,

others came to New York, Philadelphia or Montreal. From New York and Montreal they went to Toledo or Cleveland by way of the Great Lakes, then across Ohio by canal to the Ohio River, and then to the Mississippi. No matter what route they followed, they all seemed to make St. Louis their first destination before going to the lead mines.³²

The second wave of immigration came largely from the east. It was estimated that from 50,000 to 60,000 people were added to the population of the state in 1843 by way of the Great Lakes, and fully 10,000 more came in by the Mississippi.³³

Emigrants from Vermont took stage or wagon to Whitehall, at the southern extremity of Lake Champlain, often taking with them their farming implements and live stock, besides their household goods. From Whitehall they went by boat on the Northern Canal to Troy, where they met other westward bound people from northern New England and New York.³⁴ Usually the Erie Canal was followed to Buffalo, although some went by stage. Buffalo was the place toward which all lines of travel to the West converged, because it was the point of departure for a line of steamers whose western terminus was Detroit, for a time the distributing point for Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin. From Detroit the emigrants took steamer or sailboat to Green Bay, Milwaukee, Chicago, or St. Joseph. Often there was not room on these boats for all the immigrants, and then a lumber wagon, covered with a canvas, a so-called "prairie schooner," was the conveyance in which they continued their journey across the peninsula of Michigan and around the end of the lake to Chicago.

Many came from the Middle States and from the older states west of the Appalachians, but if their destination was eastern Wisconsin they all passed through one or more of the distributing points of Detroit, Chicago, Milwaukee, or Green Bay, "where they formed caravans proceeding into the interior."³⁵

³² Wisconsin in Three Centuries, Vol. III, p. 60.

³³ *Hunt's Merchant's Magazine*, Vol. X, June, 1884, p. 542.

³⁴ Thwaites, R. G.: Wisconsin, p. 246.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

(To be continued)